THE CEA CRITIC

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Regional Exchange

Newcastle Notes

Coals to Newcastle it may seem, but **CEA Critic** editor Don Sears turned his hand to serving as host to the March 19 meeting of the Greater New York Regional. President Dick Bowman and program chairman Arthur Waldhorn arranged a series of four panels on the topic "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching Literature." A fuller report of the program appears elsewhere in this issue of **The CEA Critic.**

From across the continent, Evelyn F. Thompson, secretary-treasurer of the Southern California College English Association, sends programs of their fall meeting, general theme "Motivating Majors," and their spring gathering, "New Directions in the Teaching of Language"; in addition, Sears Jayne addressed the fall luncheon meeting and Anthony G. Petti the spring. Of special interest is the last paragraph of Evelyn Thompson's letter:

"In addition to their regular association duties, this year's officers (Wade Ruby, president; Helen Barnes, vice-president; and Thompson) all chaired committees in connection with the Second Annual Convention of the California Association of English Councils, February 12 and 13, which resulted in a new statewide organization which is to be known as the California Association of Teachers of English and has as its purpose: 'to promote communication, cooperation, and a professional spirit among all people and groups who are responsible for the teaching of English, to identify and study important problems involved in the teaching of English and the professional preparation of English teachers, to develop among teachers an understanding of ways of working to improve instruction, to coordinate the efforts of affiliate organizations in projects of mutual interest and concern, and to inform and work with members of the lay public who have an interest in the teaching of English.' Thus we have attempted to show our concern for **all teaching** and **all teachers of English** at whatever level as well as for the development of a strong program for college and university professors." It is to be hoped that CEA members across the country will be allowed to share news of the developments as they take place within the framework of this new undertaking.

Elsewhere in this issue are reports of other regional meetings. **Patrick G. Hogan**
Mississippi State University

EROSION OF VALUES IN TWAIN'S HUMOR

The development of Mark Twain from a good-humored entertainer into a deterministic pessimist is one of the major problems in the study of American literature. For the critics of the twenties, thirties, and forties it was indeed a **cause celebre.** Reacting to the contention of Van Wyck Brooks in **The Ordeal of Mark Twain** that bourgeois materialism and respectability combined with the afflictions of a mother and a wife, accounted for the frustration of Twain's genius, Bernard DeVoto in **Mark Twain's America** argued a natural and inevitable evolution. Sinclair Lewis chimed in with "Fools, Liars, and Mr. DeVoto," amid perhaps too much academic concern with impugning or whitewashing Jane and Olivia Clemens.

Though an explanation of the Twain riddle may be sought in Freudian propensities and environmental influences, no attempt at an explanation should ignore the special requirements of and the tendencies inherent in the literary technique which Twain favored. That technique is not essentially quantitative but qualitative. It operates most clearly in the relatively small units of sententious pronouncements, and can there be analyzed most readily, but the same technique is embodied in the coining or odd spelling of individual words, in the sequence of events which form the structure of stories, and in the episodic complexities of larger works.

Let us recall that in Colonial America didacticism, nourished by both theological concerns and utilitarian necessity, favored the aphoristic or epigrammatic, of which Franklin is the best known representative, and not merely in **The Way to Wealth.** The tool of the self-contained, provocative sentence was sharpened by Thomas Paine in **The Crisis** papers, and proved admirably suited to the purpose of the Transcendentalists, noted for their quotable, radial style. Mark Twain proceeded ingeniously to bend or twist the compact, highly charged and finished American sentence, so that it produced often a short-circuiting effect. Such startlingly electric pronouncements are scattered through Twain's writings, but many are classified under the headings "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar" and "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar." They do not supply current; they strain it to the observed limits of the human fuse. Let me illustrate:

- "A man may have no bad habits and have worse."
- The Autocrat of Russia possesses more power than any other man in the earth, but he cannot stop a sneeze."
- "In statesmanship get the formalities right, never mind about the moralities."
- "I have traveled more than any one else and I have noticed that even the angels speak English with an accent."

The first part of each of these statements runs deceptively smooth, but it issues in a disturbing flash of critical insight into a drastic defect. The pretensions of human beings are deflated as the manifest inadequacies are stressed. The aim of Twain's aphoristic sallies appears frequently to be a corrective one, for the problem is—in part at least—one of semi-civilization or pseudo-civilization, the sort of thing Twain deliberately misspelled with an initial s at the beginning and at the end of **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.** "There are many humorous things in the world," he observed in **Following the Equator,** "among them the white man's notion that he is less savage than the other savages."

It is, however, more basically symptomatic that Twain linked the shortcomings of the human race again and again to Adam and Eve, and beyond them to God and Satan. To wit:

- "Adam was but human—this explains it all. He did not want the apple for the apple's sake, he wanted it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was in not forbidding the serpent; then he would have eaten the serpent."

(Please turn to page 7)

CEA ANNUAL MEETING

Save some time after Christmas for the annual meetings of the CEA. You might mark your date book now with the following events planned for Philadelphia.

27 Dec. 12:00 m.
Luncheon for directors and officers, Locust Room, Sylvania Hotel

27 Dec. 4:45 p.m.
Public Meeting: "Are Graduate Schools Ruining Undergradate English?" Panel to be announced. South Garden, Bellevue-Stratford.

28 Dec. 7:30 a.m.
Regional Breakfast, Provincial Room, Sylvania Hotel

28 Dec. 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Reception and Dinner, Crystal Room, Bellevue-Stratford

Watch the pages of **The CEA Critic** for announcement of speakers. And when in Philadelphia, plan to visit friends at the CEA suite; the welcome sign is always there.

THE CEA CRITIC

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How A Great Major May Be Reduced To A Small

Certain recalcitrants in CEA have consistently looked at graduate education in English as a preparation rather irrelevant to their actual careers as teachers, and at least twice in the past decades, CEA committees have officially recommended drastic changes. Now and then instructors and young assistant professors say some bitter things, but subside then into writing articles for the journals of opinion or buckle down to the real business of our trade—contributing to the flood of papers on literary history and literary criticism. Meanwhile graduate education in English becomes, year by year, a little more of what it always has been, only flourishing more exuberantly in the new masters and doctoral programs appearing like dandelions in a library lawn. One would guess that the critics are wrong, and that the rightness of the graduate program is attested in its uniformity and its propagation.

Still, there are dissenters, and of late they have begun to inquire whether the evils of graduate education in English are peculiar to us, after all. Perhaps they are part, only, of a larger and more pervasive evil—the shape of graduate schools in general. Lately the charge has come from Howard McGrath, who has been researching graduate education, that the graduate school is an academic evil and a real one, doing real and measurable damage to the liberal arts college. Doing more than damage, in fact. McGrath says it is killing them.

Those who, like McGrath, enjoy big problems can take that one on whole, but CEA likes to stick with the one we have been worrying right along. We feel that a responsible profession owes it to itself to scrutinize its own actions and correct its own defects, and that we ought to apply ourselves to recognizable, familiar, homely defects. Therefore CEA proposes to devote the 1960 annual meeting to a discussion of McGrath's question made specific in our terms: "Are the graduate schools killing undergraduate English?"

Can such a thing be possible? As the graduate schools thrive, are they so perverting undergraduate English as to poison it to death? Will these swollen graduate enterprises, so numerous and so uniform, ultimately hang in the academic air, unsupported by viable undergraduate programs and unprovided with students? Some people certainly think so. There is considerable daylight visible now between graduate education in English and the needs of undergraduate English, with a large part of the instructional burden of English departments quite outside the concerns of graduate school specializations. Further, there are signs that undergraduate English programs are contracting into the sphere of those specializations.

Studies not obviously contributory to literary history and literary criticism show signs of being squeezed out of the undergraduate program, or of not being admitted to it, so that it is becoming relevant to the career needs of fewer students. A movement at present to get rid of Freshman English and cut off a host of teaching problems peculiarly resistant to critical and historical scholarship could cut off, at the same time, from sixty to eighty percent of the students we now reach. The same exclusiveness that has in the past found that education in speech, drama, and journalism is not English finds that improving the reading and writing of college students in general is not English, and further, that, though the study of Old and Middle English sounds and forms is English, the study of Modern English sounds and forms is not; that vocabulary study is English, but the study of the structure of sentences is not.

Suppose we do let freshman English go to Communications, let the quasi-literary, non-literary, and humanistic aspects of English go to other departments—the linguistics of English to the anthropologists and linguists, the teaching of English to the Educationists, philosophy and values to humanities—and keep as English, the real true English, only those courses and subjects that can be accommodated to the interests of publishing literary specialists who have accommodated themselves to the publishing specialists of the graduate schools. Free thus from the distraction of coping with hordes of freshmen and non-majors, we might then concentrate on our majors, people like ourselves who can love or learn to love literature, the criticism of literature, and the history of literature.

"What majors?" the critics ask.

Donald Lloyd

NOTICES OF NOTE

In July The New American Libary published **Toward the Liberally Educated Executive**, edited by R. A. Goldwin and C. A. Nelson. In this volume, 21 top business leaders and educators discuss what the liberal arts may do in developing present and future executives. An earlier version of this collection was put out by the Fund for Adult Education, whose president, C. Scott Fletcher, writes in the introduction, "Much of the Stimulus to businessmen to consider the merits of liberal education has come from the Humanities Center for Liberal Education and its imaginative director, Dr. Max H. Goldberg." CEA members will remember from Institutes and Seminars the words of such contributors as Gilbert W. Chapman, Francis H. Horn, A. M. Sullivan, Frederic E. Pamp, Jr., and John Ciardi.

(Please turn to page 4)

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PAPERBOUND PREVIEWS

Looking for new paperbounds suitable for text or personal use? Then take a look at the following books published during the summer or scheduled for October release (a full forecast of summer publications appeared in the **May Critic**) This list focuses on original titles and on new reprints of hardbound titles.

Arnold, Matthew. **Culture and Anarchy:** Cambridge U. Press.
Baring, Maurice. **Landmarks in Russian Literature:** Barnes & Noble University Paperback.
Brooks, Cleanth (ed.). **Tragic Themes in Western Literature:** Yale U. Press.
Budgen, Frank. **James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses:** Indiana U. Press Midland Book.
Eliot, T. S. **The Sacred Wood:** Barnes & Noble University Paperback.
Euripides. **Ten Plays by Euripides** (tr. Moses Hadas and J. H. McLean): Bantam.
Evergreen Review No. 15: Grove Evergreen.
Gaskell, Elizabeth. **Cranford:** Doubleday Dolphin.
Glasgow, Ellen. **In This Our Life:** Avon.
Great Russian Plays: Dell.
Haydn, Hiram. **The Counter-Renaissance:** Grove Evergreen.
Hough, Graham (ed.). **Oscar Wilde: A Laurel Reader:** Dell.
House, Humphrey. **The Dickens World:** Oxford Paperback.
Huxley, Aldous. **Collected Essays of Aldous Huxley:** Bantam.
Ibsen, Henrik. **When We Dead Awaken and Three Other Plays** (tr. Michael Meyer): Doubleday Anchor.
Ionesco, Eugene. **Rhinoceros and Other Plays:** Grove Evergreen.
Kitto, H. D. F. **Form and Meaning in Drama:** Barnes & Noble University Paperback.
Levenson, J. C. (ed.). **Discussions of HAMLET:** D. C. Heath.
London, Jack. **Short Stories:** Hill and Wang.
Montaigne. **Complete Essays of Montaigne** (3 vols; tr. Donald M. Frame): Doubleday Anchor.
Moore, Harry T. (ed.). **Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke:** Doubleday Anchor.
Murry, J. Middleton. **The Problem of Style:** Oxford Paperback.
New World Writing 17: Lippincott Keystone.
Richards, I. A. **Coleridge on Imagination:** Indiana U. Press Midland Book.
Sale, Roger (ed.). **Discussions of the Novel:** D. C. Heath.
Snow, C. P. **The Search:** New American Library.
Stang, Richard (ed.). **Discussions of George Eliot:** D. C. Heath.
Stern, Milton R. (ed.). **Discussions of MOBY-DICK: D. C. Heath.**
Wolfe, Thomas. **You Can't Go Home Again:** Dell.

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Letters to the Editor

Sir:

During one of my earlier avatars, when I was a law student and practicing attorney, we learned the distinction between a **self-serving declaration** and an **admission against interest.** The latter was considered to have by far the higher probative value. Perhaps I shall some day see a defense of Anglo-Saxon as a requirement for graduate students of English written by a specialist in Victorian poetry or modern drama instead of by one who teaches courses in **Beowulf et al.** Professor Markman (**The CEA Critic**, March, 1960, pp. 4, 5, & 11) is, no doubt, a dedicated scholar and teacher of Old English, but the reader can never forget that his courses are, to some extent at least, kept alive by departmental requirements rather than by the interest of students who freely elect those courses.

On the merits, it would seem that a requirement should be fundamentally based on the scholarly and professional needs of the student. "La lecon doit etre une reponse," wrote an eminent educational psychologist, and it is no longer considered completely heretical to apply sound educational principles to the curriculum, even on the graduate level. One example will suffice. A doctoral candidate who expects to write a psycho-literary study of an accepted author has spent a great deal of time passing courses and examinations in philology, but no one has taken the trouble to find out whether the candidate knows enough psychology to distinguish between a neurosis and a neurone.

Leonard F. Manheim
Editor, LITERATURE & PSYCHOLOGY

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Mr. Thompson's TV Course in Composition

All teachers of freshman composition should be grateful to Donald G. Thompson for his article in the May **Critic** on "Television and Freshmen English." We need worry no longer about pressure from administrators (pressed in their turn by trustees or legislators—or simply lack of cash) to accept a higher student-teacher ratio. Now (if we can persuade them to install a television system) we can contently relax, having been shown not only that we can teach far more students than we had previously dreamed was possible but that at the same time we can effect "a significant improvement in the teaching of written communication."

It is heart-warming, too, to learn that in Mr. Thompson's system "mere 'correct' English is not a primary concern," but that students will be taught to **think**—will be given "those habits of thought necessary for understanding and evaluating expository and persuasive readings and for expressing ideas understandably and cogently." This is what we all aim at.

Only, most of us have stupidly assumed that the only way to do it was by asking questions, either in class, or in conference, or in the margin of a theme: such questions as "Why?" "How do you know?" "Who says so," "So what?" "For example?" Or even such time-consuming questions as 'What has this got to do with your topic?" or "How do you reconcile this with what you said in the first paragraph?" As a result we have found ourselves spending ten or fifteen minutes on a theme, and ten or fifteen hours a week in reading themes, even when we have only about sixty students.

But now, by Mr. Thompson's method, we can read forty themes an hour if the students are good, or twenty-five an hour if they are not. At this rate we need devote only six hours a week to reading themes, and still handle four times as many good students (240) or two and a half times as many poor students (150) as we did before. It is true that these are 300-word themes, and some of us think that if we are concerned with "understanding and evaluation," 500-word themes are better. But at the same rate (thirty seconds per hundred words for good writing and forty-seconds per hundred words for poor writing) we could still read twenty-four good themes and fifteen poor ones in an hour.

We should of course like to know a little more definitely what **kind** of "positive comments" Mr. Thompson's graders put on themes; but perhaps he will tell us in another article. (One might also query whether he could not find a better name for a reader of themes than "grader"—a term which to unfriendly critics might suggest a machine to level earth or sort potatoes.)

Mr. Thompson also earns our gratitude by calling our attention to the "now thoroughly neglected problem of motivation." It had never occurred to us before that every college freshman was not bursting with ideas and the desire to express them. Or if they had, we had unimaginatively tried merely to talk sense to our students, with examples from their and our experience about the usefulness of being able to make oneself understood. Or at the other extreme we had indulged the impossible fancy that we ought to be able to take time, occasionally, to talk to students individually about their personal interests and aims, and try to link these to the need for skill in writing. What a relief—for those few of us who **had** thought about the problems—to know that it can now be taken care of by "a single, carefully prepared . . . motivation presentation . . . given to large numbers of students on television"! (Of course, again, we should like to be told a little more about what this "presentation" would be like.)

There will probably always be a few die-hard reactionaries who will insist that there is no easy way of teaching students to write—and think—clearly; who will declare that anyone who promulgates such a scheme as Mr. Thompson's is currying favor with administrators while defrauding students; that both administrators and students ought to be told: "There is no such thing as cut-rate education. And if, instead of telling the public this unpleasant truth, those who run our colleges and universities prefer to juggle the student-teacher ratio, we will still do the best we can, because we like teaching and we like students. But we should not be asked, after we have sacrificed our standards, to be hypocrites besides—to dream up some methodological gadgets by which we can hoax people into thinking that we can teach more students and teach them better than before. No matter how you slice it, it's still baloney."

But for such ill-tempered opponents of progress Mr. Thompson has a decisive answer. He ran a "control study" by giving a small group of students in a conventional classroom the same course that he gave on television; and the television students learned as much as the others.

Ellsworth Barnard
Northern Michigan College

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The CEA Critic, the official publication of The College English Association, appears monthly nine times a year, September through May. Subscription, including membership dues in the CEA, is $4.50 a year ($2.50 a year to libraries).

The outgrowth of the former **CEA Newsletter, The CEA Critic** reports the activities of national and regional meetings of the CEA and informs members on the wide concerns of college English teachers in our modern technological age. Speaking for and to CEA members, it moves within the broad area, where teaching and research meet. The best scholarship rendered viable for the classroom by the best pedagogy — this is what it seeks to publish.

The CEA Critic also acts as the voice of the critical minority. Its columns are open to even the minority of one who finds in the ever-expanding range of college English teaching a point of dissatisfaction. At a time when all institutions are becoming more monolithic, it preserves the right of the individual: it broadcasts the individual voice, crying sometimes in anger, sometimes in frustration, and sometimes in seeming defeat. It welcomes debate and is most itself when is is most forensic.

Articles submitted should therefore be relatively short, yet should have the flow of excellent conversation. With the aims to inform and to stimulate, they should avoid the jazzy glibness of Madison Avenue as well as the sterility of dry-as-dust pedantry.

The CEA Critic is open to all articles that carry the conviction of the author's concern, a concern tempered only by responsibility.

das

NOTICES OF NOTE

(Continued from page 2)

Beginning with the September 17 issue, the **Saturday Review** publishes a monthly supplement on education, sponsored by the Fund for the Advancement of Education. The purpose of the supplement is to focus public attention on the basic educational problems facing America. It evaluates criticisms of the schools and seeks to clarify discussion of new developments that give promise of improving education. The supplement is edited by Paul Woodring of the Fund staff. He serves as Education Editor of the **Saturday Review** and is assisted by John J. Scanlon, also of the Fund staff.

English and Related Disciplines

The annual spring meeting of the Greater New York regional was held Saturday, March 19, at Upsala College, East Orange, New Jersey — the new academic home of **The CEA Critic.** The general topic of the four panels, arranged by program chairman Arthur Waldhorn (City College of New York), was "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching Literature." In two morning and two afternoon sessions, twelve panelists and sizeable audiences discussed the extent to which art, science, psychology, and religion can illumine the work of literature.

• • •

Literature and Art. Panelists: Donald McGinn (Rutgers); Kingman Grover (Cooper Union); Hubert Crehan (School of Visual Arts). Professor McGinn, deploring academic opposition to correlating the arts of literature, painting, sculpture, and music, contended that each art helps widen and deepen appreciation of the others. Suggesting that all arts in any given epoch influence and are influenced by one another, he pointed out the value of applying common terminology to all. Thus, labels like Rennaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Classical, Rococo, Romantic, Realistic, Non-Objective, and the like may prove more useful than those conventionally used by literary historians and critics.

Professor Grover's close analysis of parallel Baroque characteristics in Michelangelo, El Greco, and Donne (**Holy Sonnets**) helped to elaborate and apply Professor McGinn's thesis. Without attempting to prove influences, Professor Grover suggested the presence of similar emotions and techniques.

Although he denied any direct relationship between literature, art, and music, Mr. Crehan agreed that a study of one might surely heighten appreciation of the others. Mr. Crehan cited the technique of pastiche and collage used by Picasso as being closely related to T. S. Eliot's fused fragments, and noted that both display an engaging and enlightening eclecticism.

• • •

Literature and Science. Panelists: Samuel Mintz, Stephen Merton, Henry Wasser (all of The City College of New York). Dr. Mintz urged that students be well grounded in intellectual history and in the history of science. Illustrating, he analyzed the impact of science on 17th century literature and observed two major effects—one on style, the second on poetic imagination. The efforts of Bacon and his followers in the Royal Society were significant in paring the conceits and metaphors of Renaissance prose style to bare, unadorned statement—concise, direct, but colorless. On the other hand, though the discoveries of Galileo at first alienated poets, they soon shifted from despair before the new cosmology and, like Donne, Vaughan, and Traherne, came to delight in and explore the possibilities science offered their poetic imagination.

Professor Merton traced the pervasive though diverse effects science has indirectly had upon literature and upon human values. Thus, in the 17th century, Sir Thomas Browne believed that the scientist's task was to study the supernatural: Nature was the manuscript whose hieroglyphics revealed the nature of God. But for the Romantics the locus shifted from the supernatural to nature (Wordsworth) as the embodiment of values to be celebrated, and to the imaginative (Coleridge), the internal, introspective element in literature. In modern fiction, as in Joyce's **Ulysses,** the external world symbolizes the internal world.

Like Walt Whitman, Henry Adams says that a man of letters must confront the facts of science and recognize their centrality to literature and human experience. Science is the framework for speculation, the frame of reference for activity as a man of letters. Professor Wasser demonstrated Adams' use of the theory of evolution and of the second law of thermodynamics—not naively but with statistical evidence—in his **History of the United States** to estimate the potential of a nation in flux. Adams' inductive principles, applied to close observation of the cathedrals at Mt. St. Michel and Chartres, led to his conclusions about the development of the cult of Mary in the late 13th century. Finally, Adams' stylistic lucidity and irony in his letters and in the **Education** owe much to his immersion in science.

• • •

Literature and Religion. Panelists: Will Herberg (Drew); Philip Deasy (St. Peter's); William Turner Levy (City College). Professor Herberg argued that religion has saturated our culture and that religious traditions have shaped the form and style of English literature. But although knowledge of religion is not merely helpful but indispensable to the study of literature, the religious illiteracy of most students makes communicating that relationship exceedingly difficult. A major problem therefore becomes that of determining what kind of knowledge of religion one needs to understand literature.

Professor Deasy discussed three works—**Ulysses, The Waste Land,** and **The Fall**—variant in their Christian content but all adapted to a religious orientation toward literature.

Professor Levy's central thesis was that religion not only illuminates literature but also enriches the student's contact with literature. Referring to St. Augustine, Bunyan, Browne, Dante, and Hopkins, he suggested that literature can be taken out of the market place and becomes a means of inspiration.

• • •

Literature and Psychology. Panelists: Leonard Manheim (City College); Simon O. Lesser (National Broadcasting Company); Paul C. Obler (Drew).

NOTE: This group held a round table discussion. Following are representative problems raised by Dr. Manheim and representative comments by Dr. Lesser and Professor Obler.

How can the psycho-literary approach be best used in teaching? Dr. Lesser suggested that psychology should be sparingly used and with the utmost tact. He noted, for example, that in teaching **Sons and Lovers,** his students showed so much hostility toward their own mothers that they misinterpreted Morel's attitude as Lawrence intended it. Thus, we ought not involve the student's own life in the novel. The teacher is explaining the work of art, not the student's life. He is not teaching clinical psychology but literature and should use depth psychology only when there is a legitimate reason for doing so, that is, to make clear the motivation of the characters.

Acting as stimulus to the discussion Professor Manheim asked, Is the psycho-literary approach to the work essentially one of explication? and is explication criticism? Professor Obler denied that psycho-literary criticism is merely explication. The psychological approach supplies a vantage point for viewing the work of art. Thus depth psychology helps us to explain and to experience the work of literature. One reason people read, Professor Obler observed in another context, is that experience and human behavior have been frozen and can be studied. He favors a "round table" act of criticism (involving specialists in literature, psychology, sociology, etc.) that enables a continuing examination of the inexhaustible possibilities of a rich work of art.

Arthur Waldhorn
The City College of New York

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New England CEA Spring Meeting

On May 7 an enthusiastic group of CEAers attended at Amherst College one of the most stimulating meetings of the New England CEA on record. C. L. Barber was program chairman and Leonard Dean presided. The day was beautiful; the sessions went from one high point to another; and everything culminated in a gracious reception tendered by the college.

Richard Ellman (Northwestern) gave a tremendously compact and effective analysis of "The Two Faces of Edward," brilliantly illustrating from all facets of the literature of the first two decades of this century his thesis that a central belief in a secular salvation dominated the time, expressed in a too non-belligerant, accepting, and optimistic atmosphere that was shattered by the war.

At the luncheon President Cole of Amherst College greeted the conferees. He begged New England college teachers to set an example for the country by using all their powers of persuasion or even subterfuge to see that a writing test be set up as a barrier between high school and college, thus forcing the secondary schools to teach writing once more. He urged that we work on our admissions officers to this end, and take the initiative away from the professional objective testers who are now in the saddle.

Benjamin DeMott (Amherst) gave a spirited but depressing evaluation of current trends in fiction, pointing out that our writers of novels have abdicated and are now concerned with emulating the popular "article" by informing readers only in non-challenging areas and in areas which appeal to their hidden longings—about power, wealth, mass control—without questioning their preconceptions or expecting them to think. This paper was packed with humor, irony, and apt illustration.

Those who attended a concurrent session on "Poetry Now" (George Garrett, Wesleyan) emerged as enthusiastic about the presentation they had heard as were those who had heard Benjamin DeMott.

The final session was given over to a most effective reading of poems by David Ferry (Wellesley) and W. D. Snodgrass (Wayne State). The audience had printed copies of the poems in their hands which enabled them to follow the readings closely, and the poets provided illuminating background explanations for each poem. The most recent Nobel Prize winner in poetry, Salvatore Quasimodo, also read from his poems in Italian after a translation of each poem had been presented.

After such a stimulating program it is carping to ask why there was no discussion. Nevertheless, we missed the give-and-take of ideas that is usually a part of CEA proceedings.

Lee E. Holt
American International College

Pons Asinorum

Preachers of the crusade against Remedial English will take heart from the following excerpt quoted from an issue of **Horatius; the Journal of Forensic Dentistry** published early last April. It is indeed gratifying to learn that our profession is not alone in its repulse of an insidious enemy who may lurk as well in a dental office as in a classroom of Freshman English.

Discontinuance of Corrective Dentistry has been announced to become effective in January, 1961. According to a directive issued by the NDA, nearly fifty per cent of the efforts of the dental profession have traditionally been devoted to remedying conditions that could and should have been corrected years before.

"There is no excuse," states the bulletin, "for the dental practitioner to give his time to caries and imperfect dentures in adult patients that are consequences of incompetent service in childhood. When previously untreated or ill-treated persons reach our offices, they must be firmly turned away. Such patients merely clutter up the waiting-room and interfere with a high standard of professional practice."

Asked about the recourse of patients whose childhood dental care had been inadequate, an official of the NDA replied: "That is their problem, not ours. It is time the pediatricians and orthodontists learn to accept their responsibility. Since refusal of elementary treatment to adults is the logical way to demonstrate it, I personally am in favor of a complete crackdown. Remember that we are professional dental surgeons, not fix-it men!"

J. D. Thomas
William Marsh Rice University

heuristic

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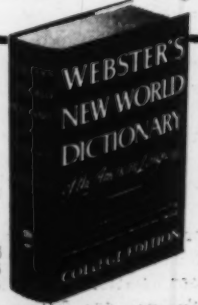

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GOOD POETRY WELL READ

For twenty-three years (about as long a period as the CEA has been causing a stir in the world of English teaching and scholarship), groups of high school students have been reading aloud in annual bardic competition at the Newark College of Rutgers University.

Contests are nothing new. But any program whose purpose is to develop the pleasure that springs from the quietly intelligent reading of good poetry merits a report to **Critic** subscribers.

The format of the affair is a simple one, on which there is no copyright. Contestants, usually selected by preliminary competition in their own schools, gather in Newark on a March Saturday, to read poems from a carefully prepared list of about 200 selections, drawn from the entire range of English and American literature. Morning winners, who usually bring with them an understanding and appreciation of the poems they read, and a freedom from the pejorative aspects of "declamation" and "elocution," compete again in the afternoon.

Only a dozen students entered the first reading in 1939. But interest in the event has increased each year; in 1959 there were six dozen entries, with many of the contestants achieving a level of excellence not readily surpassed by professional readers or by the poets themselves. Over the years many thousands of New Jersey homes have been inveigled into an interest in poetry because a family member was preparing himself for this contest.

Winners are rewarded with scholarships, books, recordings, and a prize cup (the latter for temporary possession only). Often the books or discs are author-autographed and inscribed, since more than a hundred of the world's most famous poets have agreed to perform this chore should their works be selected as prizes by the contest winners. Conrad Aiken, Walter de la Mare, T. S. Eliot, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Carl Sandburg, and others have already provided this service.

Judges have included poets, teachers, editors, critics, and miscellaneous (but qualified) lovers of poetry reading in general. Among the poets who have served on contest juries are Leonie Adams, Conrad Aiken, Kingsley Amis, past CEA president John Ciardi, Louis Ginsberg, Richard Eberhart, Jean Garrigue, Marianne Moore, A. M. Sullivan, Jean Starr Untermeyer, and Eda Lou Walton. The teachers have included Don Sears and at least forty other CEA members.

(Note: Details about organization and arrangement of such a contest are available upon request to Professor Edward Huberman, who has been managing the program for thirteen years. During the academic year 1960-61, he is visiting professor at Adelphi College — Ed.)

Edward Huberman
Newark-Rutgers

MARK TWAIN

(Continued from page 1)

- "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world."
- 'Adam and Eve had many advantages, but the principal one was that they escaped teething."
- "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practise either of them."
- "In the first place God made idiots. This was for practice. Then He made School Boards."

Though on one level these dicta have undoubtedly the calculated motivation and the likely response of the hilarious, their radical import is toward a total disillusionment with those bewildering mortals presumably created in the image of the Divine. And there is a despairing drift toward death in such recurrent observations as: "All say, 'How hard it is that we have to die'—a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have had to live."

"The Pudd'nhead Maxims" provide morever two interrelated clues to the Mark Twain riddle. One of these pertains to the devastating potential of d o w n-and-out laughter: "There is no character, however good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless." Further generalized in "The Mysterious Stranger," this maxim reads: "Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand." The other pertains to the dialectical essence of humor as Twain practiced it: "Everything human is pathetic. The secret source of Humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven." One senses the subjunctive mood in the last of these remarks, i.e. if there were a heaven of harmony, the disharmonies of humor would be inappopriate. That Twain came to have no faith in such a heaven, that he allied himself with the schoolboyish definition of faith as "believing what you know ain't so," was the logical result of a short-circuiting literary technique too well learned. What was there to prevent Twain from pricking bigger and better soap-bubbles until he had punctured the rounded world to the core and found "the damned human race" irredeemable?

In so early a piece as "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," where much depends upon local color and comic characters and an ear-bending framework, the false notion to be explored is merely the inflated betting instinct of one Jim Smiley, and this is done by confronting him with a more "transcendent genius in finesse." The structure is typical Twain: a careful build-up for a sudden let-down. And the result is a delightfully entertaining example of gullible over-confidence being outfoxed, or rather outfrogged, but the world in which it runs its humorous course remains unshaken. The idiosyncratic simpleton seems not even representative, and no reader takes him seriously as the type of a significant indictment.

In the "raftsmen passage," which was shifted from **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** to **Life on the Mississippi** and back again, the regional and period aspects are even more prominent, but here an entire class is convicted of histrionic boasting. The conviction is, by the way, much more ably developed than in the piece entitled "The Dandy Frightening the Squatter," which juxtaposes two regional types and does not yet penetrate the representative of the West. The Paul Bunyanish exaggerations of Bob and the Child of Calamity, accompanied by swaggering gestures, are given the scope of three pages, only to be quickly dispelled by "a little black-whiskered chap" called little Davy who has real guts: "Come back here, you couple of chicken-livered cowards, and I'll thrash the two of ye!" Within five lines and two minutes the would-be braggadocios "beg . . . like dogs" to be left alone, and before the amused onlookers and the knowing reader they ceremoniously make peace. The cycle of pseudo-Romantic build-up and sharp

(Please turn to page 8)

PENNSYLVANIA SESSIONS

The Pennsylvania CEA held its annual meeting on April 2 at Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania, with 70 members present.

The papers at the morning session, which was devoted to Mark Twain in commemorating his death fifty years ago (April, 1910), were "Mark Twain: His Style of Humor and the Erosion of Values," by Gerhard Friedrich, Cedar Crest; and "Mark Twain, an American Innocent Abroad," by James Vitelli, Lafayette. In the absence of Professor Friedrich, his paper was read by Ralph Rees, Bucknell. Chairman for the session was Richard J. Stonesifer, Franklin and Marshall. (A revision of Professor Friedrich's paper appears on page 1 of this issue.)

At the afternoon session, Henry W. Sams, head of the English Department at Pennsylvania State University and former president of the CEA, addressed the group. In his paper, "The Muse Unchained," he discussed the origin of the CEA and presented the characteristics of the genuinely literary man. P. Burwell Rogers, Bucknell, the retiring president, was chairman of the session. J. B. Douds, head of the English Department, and Samuel B. Shirk, Albright, were in charge of arrangements.

At the business meeting, Richard Bozorth, the University of Pennsylvania, was elected president; L. S. Lingenfelter, Millersville State College, vice-president; and Ralph S. Graber, Muhlenberg, re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Next year's meeting will be held at Villanova University.

Ralph S. Graber
Muhlenberg College

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MARK TWAIN

(Continued from page 7)

Realistic deflation is then repeated by having Ed's elaborate story of the haunted barrel and Dick Allbright's baby—dead for three years—issue in little Davy's commonsensical question: "Well, never mind how it could cry—how it could **keep** all that time? . . . You answer me that." The inglorious pair of Bob and the Child of Calamity, themselves exposed in the previous episode, join in digging the victim of this round. Such are the incongruities of deception and perception: man is the paradox who knows better but does worse. Incidentally, more potent subject-matter for destructive laughter is hidden under the cautious references to swearing and to not-so-nice songs, to infanticide and desertion.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn presents of course, geographically and socially, a wider range of the human species. In Huck's "I reckoned I would see if there was anything in it" we find Twain's Realistic perception once again at work. The pervading habit of Mark Twain to see things "go bust" for the sake of whatever lesson has here a partial compensation in the nostalgic mood; it feeds that mood. "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed" is devoid of such retrospective glorification. Beyond its surface level of "horse-play and school-boy hilarity," there is a more sober stabbing at the personified embodiments of various human weaknesses and a weighty penetration into the nature of war as an institution. Special interest attaches to "the ass with the French name," who has respelled the common name Dunlap as d'Unlap and d'Un Lap, to give himself a pseudo-Gallic distinction, which he further exploits etymologically. Twain remarks pointedly that "He had some pathetic little nickel-plated aristocratic instincts," and dubs him "the mongrel child of philology." The account proceeds to turn the military "dreams of glory into a repulsive nightmare."

The subversive tendency of Twain the humorist went on to treat even the greatness of history and the Divine center of worship as impositions. That choice Twain item entitled **Fireside Conversation in the Time of Queen Elizabeth,** later **1601,** is indeed not merely an uninhibited Rabelaisian exercise in what Howells termed Twain's "Elizabethan breadth of parlance." The historical figures involved and their halo of heroism are exploded by the simplest of means: stomach gas and obscene exclamations. Man, in whatever magnificent disguises, is thereby reduced to the ingloriously animalistic, and—as the sketch on "Purchasing Civic Virtue" makes further clear—he is but an index of materialistic determinism. Homo sapiens is at last presented as grossly conceived and outcast into a world marked by a naturalistic lack of value. This final inadequacy, this final joke, is indicated in the structure of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," where the Devil—Prince of Darkness and of spoofers—manages by an elaborate strategy of deception first to encourage and then to expose the hollowness of a village of hypocrites. In "What Is Man?" and "The Mysterious Stranger" the didactic humorist with his puncturing device is at last engaged in such dark questioning that his laughter has almost consumed itself, having been aged into bitter pessimism. Whatever humor there is points toward despair. Satan as arch undeceiver impresses upon the symbolically-named Theodor that "there is no God . . . And you are but . . . a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!"

Twain's technique of humor became a cancerous habit of laughing any and all presumed values to pieces. From the Mississippi, ranging west and east over the oddities of the globe, inward to the springs of anthropoidal motivations, and upward to the controlling scheme, Twain discovered always the incongruities, the imperfections, the adopted or built-in inadequacies; and the remedial intent proved less strong than the method of provocative laughter. From local idiosyncrasies to empty eternities: that was the "progress" of Twain's substance-denying, disintegrating enterprise; for humor, depending upon fixed values, unfixes and feeds upon those very values if it is voracious enough.

If Twain was right in asserting that there is no humor in heaven, then he was apparently playing his own devil's game all along. In the character of Satan he spoke of degrees of humorous vision. Underdeveloped, "You have a mongrel perception of humor, nothing more; a multitude of you possess that. This multitude see the comic side of a thousand low-grade and trivial things—broad incongruities mainly; grotesqueries, absurdities, evokers of the horselaugh." In the intermediate stage, the human race is seen as living "a life of continuous and uninterrupted self-deception. It duped itself from cradle to grave with shams and delusions which it mistook for realities, and this made its entire life a sham." These are "the ten thousand high-grade comicalities . . . sealed from . . . dull vision." Finally comic insight proposes—with demonic comprehensiveness—that **"Nothing** exists."

The paradoxical success of Twain's technique of probing and exploding was, then, that it left him at last with nothing but debris—cosmic debris. "Dream other dreams, and better!" his departing Satan advised, satanically not leaving anything to build from.

> . . . your universe and its contents . . . are frankly and hysterically insane . . . : a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made everyone of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; . . . who mouths justice and invented hell—mouths mercy and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules and invented hell; who mouths morals to other people and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes, yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship him!

Note that these indicting statements, like many of "The Pudd'nhead Maxims," are in pre-twentieth-century terms the most basic literary equivalents of the shadow that falls between the idea and the reality, between the potency and the existence. Mark Twain, having in his own hilarious way blundered into the heart of darkness, had his epitaph written in "The Hollow Men."

Gerhard Friedrich
Cedar Crest College

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